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ABSTRACT

Current social, economic, and policy trends threaten to erase the gains in educational access and attainment minorities have made since 1960. The educational reform movements of the past two decades reinforced the concepts of equity and opportunity, but in the face of financial exigency and retrenchment, driven by state legislatures and public pressures, there is a heightened concern about education's role in the national economy, and the feeling has emerged that excellence has been eroded in the pursuit of equity. This paper explores the issues and trends of minority participation in the community college system in particular, and in higher education in general. In addition, strategies that community colleges can use to address the issues are suggested. The paper focuses on: (1) the impact of minority population increase on the community college; (2) minority enrollment patterns; (3) equity and excellence; (4) selective admissions and competency testing; (5) financial aid; (6) the role of secondary schools in fostering minority access; and (7) the role of minority professionals. Concluding comments offer several objectives related to minority enrollment, retention and graduation rates, and significant minority presence at all levels of the institution. A bibliography is included. (EJV)

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CLOSING THE DOOR: THE FUTURE OF MINORITIES IN TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

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CLOSING THE OPEN DOOR: THE FUTURE OF MINORITIES IN TWO YEAR INSTITUTIONS

The term minority encompasses a growing diversity. We use it in this discussion to refer to Blacks, Hispanics, Chicanos, Asian Americans and American Indians. Each group has different rates of growth, geographic areas of concentration, cultural and family customs and insitutional supports. Nevertheless, there are sufficient commonalities in their community college experience that we can speak about them as a group while at the same time highlighting their special differences.

For a variety of reasons -- costs, geographic access, open-door philosophy -- minorities have utilized the community college as the preferred avenue to the post-secondary experience. However, current social, economic and policy trends threaten to erase the gains in access and educational attainment that minorities have made since 1960. Unless these trends are arrested, there is a real danger that America could develop a permanent racial underclass, consisting of millions of impoverished minorities living in urban ghettoes[1].

Minority gains over the past two decades were achieved through:

1. The use of legal powers by local, state and federal governments in ending discriminatory practices. The federal government was the dominant influence in this movement;

2. The expansion of educational institutions, particularly the two-year college sector;

3. The expansion of financial aids -- including grants, loans and scholarships;

4. Agressive recruitment of minorities by the institutions.

5. A variety of programs to aid the historically black institutions.[2]

In addition, the educational reform movements of that period reinforced the concepts of equity and opportunity. Those were the golden years when the policies and practices of American education were driven by the politics of expansion. Today, the momentum for expansion has slackened. The spectre of financial exigency and retrenchment haunt academic discussions. Driven by public pressures, the concerns of state legislatures and unanswered questions about the value of a community college education, state agencies are asking college adminitrators probing questions about the outcomes, impacts and cost benefits of their programs. Economic uncertainty has also spawned a reform movement for quality and excellence. There is a heightened concern about education's role in the nation's economic well being and a feeling in significant quarters that excellence has been eroded in the pursuit of equity.

However, both the pursuit of excellence and the pursuit of equity must be recognized as imperatives within the educational system. Eliminating barriers to the full participation in education of minorities is more crucial today than it was two decades ago because the prospects for minorities in higher education is exceedingly bleak.

What do these sentiments portend for minorities when the social economic and political realities of the 1980's and beyond are considered. Let us examine these issues and trends and provide a number of strategies for coping with them.

The Impact of Minority Population Increase on the Community College

In a largely enrollment driven system of higher education, discussions of the impact of demographic change on educational institutions have usually focused on the decline of the 18-21 age cohort and the impact of this decline on college enrollments during the next two decades. However, the United States is experiencing other profound demographic changes. One such change is the significant increase in the growth of its minority population, which will be of enormous consequnce to the political, economic and social future of the nation. The burgeoning minority populations represent an underdeveloped national resource. According to a recent report, Demographic Imperatives: Implications for Educational Policy, prepared by Jan McNett for the American Council on Education, the following demographic trends were delineated:

1. The average age of the white population is growing older -- that of the minority population is much younger;

2. Minorities constitute the majority of school enrollments in 23 of 25 of the nation's largest cities;

3. By the year 2000, 53 major cities will have a majority minority population;

4. The United States is seeking to integrate into North American culture the second largest wave of immigrants in history -- a total of 13.9 million, many of them from Asia and the Pacific Islands;

5. Hispanic Population growth (103%) has been and continues to be the highest of all groups;

6. Sixty percent of all Hispanics live in three states (California, Texas and New York), 85% in nine states;

7. Hispanics are the most urbanized group, with 88% living in the cities, but more blacks live in inner cities (71%) than any other population group;

8. Black and Hispanic participation in education diminishes drastically at higher levels;

9. The majority of blacks in higher education are enrolled in community colleges or predominantly black and Hispanic institutions;

10. Serious erosion has occurred in the rates of black and Hispanic high school graduates who go on to college.[3]

Although there is growing recognition of the importance of such demographic changes, there is also apprehension that educational institutions are not responding quickly or adequately enough in developing policies that will maximize the contributions to be made by the increasing numbers of minorities in the population.

An intermingling of growth and decline among various segments of the population, regional population shifts and a new wave of immigration have important implications for two-year institutions.

Minority Enrollment Patterns

One of the defining characteristics of higher education enrollment is the overwhelming presence of minority students in two-year institutions. Minority students accounted for 20% of all enrollments in two-year colleges. A good index of their presence is each minority group's two-year college enrollment as a percentage of that group's total undergraduate enrollments. For example, blacks enroll 50% of their students in two-year institutions; Asians - 52%; Hispanics - 59%; American Indians - 67%; white students who constitute 79% of all two-year enrollments concentrate 45% of their numbers in these institutions.[4]

The trend towards part time, non-traditional students does not fit the enrollment pattern of minority students. Instead, we find a disproportionately large number of traditional minority students enrolled in two-year institutions. For Asians, 33% of their full time students are enrolled in two-year institutions; blacks - 37%; Hispanics 45%; American Indians - 48%. Only 27% of full time white students are enrolled in two-year institutions.[5]

The persistent pattern of ethnic stratification within higher education suggests restricted access to the bacalaureate and professional levels as well as formidable barriers to mobility for ethnic minorities within the larger American society.

If access is defined as "the ability to enter a college," their enrollment data suggest that minorities have increased their access into higher education. However, when plotted against the axis of distribution, we find a disproportionate attendance at community colleges. This segregation raises serious questions about the occupational and professional futures of minorities. Given limited egress from the two-year tier and the relative lack of articulation agreements between junior and senior colleges, predominant community college enrollment will continue to work to the disadvantage of minorities.

A further examination of minority enrollment patterns also reveals that minorities are concentrated primarily in urban institutions. This is a reflection of their metropolitan and inner city residential pattern. These urban enrollments inflate two-year minority ratios, which in turn, inflate post-secondary attendance figures. Aggregate enrollment statistics mask the exclusion of minorities from an expanding roster of post-secondary institutions.

Ethnic institutions have emerged as alternatives to the mainstream educational system which is perceived by minority communities as being unresponsive to their students. However, despite the furor over affirmative action, special admissions and preferential treatment, the data supports the view that there has been little erosion in the historical pattern of attendance and enrollment. To the extent that racial prejudice and the psychological sets associated with minority status affect development, important issues are raised for minority students. The concrete issue of academic preparedness add to their problems of adjusting to the academic environment. These issues are now embodied in the current debate on excellence and equity.

Excellence and Equity

One of the outcomes of the fiscal crisis now affecting post-secondary education is a renewed concern with access and academic standards. This concern impacts heavily on community colleges. Expanding access has been one of the founding concepts of the community college. Increasing opportunities for new client populations has been signally successful.[6] Today, however, the community college's attempt to maintain quality and standards while fulfilling an open-door mission has created a quandary in its educational practice.[7]

How do we fulfill an open-door mission and at the same time maintain the academic integrity of the institution? Ironically, we can only do so by establishing, imposing and maintaining

performance standards. The imperatives are clear for effectively treating the cancer of inadequate preparation that is metastasizing throughout the community colleges. There has been an imbalance of emphasis on access, with inadequate attention paid to the financial, human and instructional resources necessary to secure appropriate student persistence and accomplishment.

The skill deficiencies of minority students can be addressed through an effective and conscientious program of assessing student abilities and learning so that appropriate instructional experiences can be provided. A program which establishes measurable standards, exit criteria and monitoring procedures can best accomplish this objective. The program structure should also include the following elements:

1. An admission/assessment phase that allows for diagnosis and prescription;

2. A well designed orientation program which could be complemented by courses on college survival and career exploration;

3. A counseling and advising system which provides for the identification and training of sensitive advisors within various academic departments. Services should be provided from admissions through job placement;

4. A standard of academic progress;

5. An academic monitoring system for the early identification of students experiencing academic difficulties before the failing process is significantly advanced;

6. An academic support system comprised of open labs, faculty and peer tutorials and special remedial courses;

7. An institution-wide retention committee designed to enhance the recruitment, retention and graduation rates of minorities;

8. Departmental retention committees with similar functions;

9. A sensitive exit-interview process for acquiring information on the reasons students leave the institution.

In addition, the institution should conduct on-going environmental assessments to determine what aspects of the institution might be contributing to minority attrition.

Unfortunately, two-year institutions have not dealt seriously with the problem of minority attrition. This neglect issues from the belief that unrestricted access to college via a non-selective admissions process fosters the noble goal of educational opportunity to members of our society who have been denied the means of upward mobility. But the open door was never meant to allow individuals into a college. It meant providing the conditions under which the individual could learn. As distressing as the attrition figures are, even more distressing is the complacency and disinterest which many college administrators evinced toward these statistics.

Several institutions have demonstrated that attrition can be reduced by almost 50% if special services are provided for high risk students.[8] A brief period of remediation cannot effectively counteract several years of academic deficiencies. Simply to pitchfork them into the academic mainstream without some monitoring mechanism and ongoing support is to consign many

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minorities to another round of failure. We must guard against the twin possibilities that basic skills programs will serve a "cooling-out" function in two-year institutions by depressing motivation to the point where the student leaves and also serve as a foreclosure to further education.[9]

The sensible approach, then, is to develop special counseling programs and a rational sequence of courses that directly confront the problems of these students - academic deficiencies, low motivation, low self-esteem and inadequate preparation - so that they can be channeled in appropriate directions.

Selective Admissions and Competency Testing

Although the standardized test scores of minorities have improved over the last decade.[10] During the same period 39 states passed laws tightening requirements for high school graduation and college admission. The new standards included increased course requirements, higher minimums for class rankings and grade point averages and minimum admissions test requirements, all of which critics say have been shown to adversely affect minority students.[11] Raising admissions requirements focuses solely upon prior student performance and not upon the ability of the institution to assist in further student learning and development.

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According to its proponents, competency testing will rectify prior inequities in the education of minority students by providing a basis for diagnosis and remediation of long standing academic deficiencies. Competency testing also provides minority students the incentives and opportunity for renewed effort and improved achievements. Given the differential vulnerability of minorities to adverse classification, critics contend that the minimum competency approach represents another area of potential discrimination against minorities and an additional obstacle to the attainment of social and economic equality in American life. Minorities are over-represented at the lower end of the academic spectrum. It is believed that competency testing may reinforce the stigma of failure for low achieving students and could take a heavy toll on a large number of academically marginal but highly motivated minority students. The evidence from several two-year institutions suggest that it's a significant and disproportionate toll and at what many believe to be a socially and politically unacceptable cost. Failure increases anxiety and lowers self-esteem and may be the final discouragement which causes them to abandon their schooling. By emphasizing the punitive aspects of testing, the minimum competency approach fails to maximize the potential of tests as diagnostic and remedial tools.

Educational credentials are particularly important determinants of future socio-economic status for members of minority groups. Therefore, over the long term, minimum

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competency testing could affect substantially the access opportunities of minorities to post-secondary institutions, depress their educational an career prospects and, thus, heighten existing inequalities.

Financial Aid

Perhaps the most critical factor affecting the access of minorities to post-secondary education is that of inadequate levels of financial assistance. The problems of blacks is illustrative of those facing other minorities. In 1981, 48% of black college bound seniors came from families with incomes under $12,000 compared to only 10% of their white counterparts.[12]

Census data indicate that the sources of income for most black students are loans, scholarships and governmental programs (BEOG, SEOG, Social Security). White students, on the other hand, receive much of their support from personal savings, parental contributions and earnings. The implications are evident: without substantial financial aid from sources other than the family, black students' higher education opportunities would be severely limited. It is precisely because of economic stringency that many blacks enroll in two-year colleges. Economic factors also account for the continued high black enrollment in historically black institutions. In addition to their attractive qualities, black colleges tend to charge less for tuition, fees and housing. Financial considerations affect

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not only where students go to college but their rate of persistence.[13] Among black Americans receiving student aid, the dropout rate was 24.4%, blacks receiving no aid dropped out at almost twice the rate. Student financial aid is crucial to the notion of equal educational opportunity. Need-based financial aid programs has had some success in reducing economic restrictions to college attendance, but major retrenchments are already underway. The number of minority high school graduates enrolling in college between 1978 and 1983 declined drastically because of major reductions in aid packages, new eligibiltiy requirements, new standards of academic progress for financial aid recipients, major increases in tuition and fees and declining family income. For example, although the number of black high school graduates increased by 29% between 1975 and 1981, their college participation rate dropped by 11%. And although the number of Hispanic high school graduates increased by 38% between 1975 and 1981, their college participation dropped by 16%.[14] In 1983 approximately 500,000 more black students graduated from high school than in 1976, but 8,000 fewer black students were enrolled in college than in 1982.

These results are directly attributable to the fact that lower-income families, among whom are a disproportionate share of minority students, lost resources during this period both in the form of family income and in student aid dollars. An analysis by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) of the Reagan administration's initial

budget plan estimated that nearly a quarter million students from families with incomes of less than $16,000 would each lose an average of about $1,160 in federal student aid under the administration's budget proposals. An additional 96,000 students from families with incomes between $6,000 and $12,000 would also have their aid reduced. More specifically, the proposed cuts would reduce federal student aid for more than 105,000 minority students from families with incomes below $25,000. About 80% of these students come from families with annual incomes of less than $12,000 and about 60% come from families with incomes of less than $6,000 per year.[15]

What is even more unfortunate is that many minority students fail to claim their entitlement because they are unaware of their eligibility for student aid programs. College recruiters and admission officers must make this information available to minoirty high school seniors and juniors in a timely fashion so that it becomes part of their decision process regarding college attendance.

Critics of student aid programs argue that it is another welfare payment and that low income students receive a free ride through college because they contribute nothing to their education. The facts are that all students who are not paying the full cost of their education are part of the grants economy. Also, low-income students and minority students and their families are paying a substantial portion of the costs of college attendance.[16] Furthermore, despite the availability

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of student aid, a college education remains financially out of reach for many of these families. For example, in 1977-78, 39% of the BEOG awards went to individuals who would not otherwise have enrolled.[17]

In view of the critical role financial assistance plays in the academic success of minority students, institutions will have to strengthen their financial aid programs to better address their needs. Additional resources may be obtained by working with foundations, banking institutions, business and industry and civic groups. In addition, in packaging financial aid awards, care should be exercised in avoiding combinations that appear detrimental to students' persistence.

The Role of Secondary Schools in Fostering Minority Access

Without reviewing the extensive literature on desegregation of minority elementary and secondary schooling, it can be suggested that inequality in public K-12 systems results in unequal opportunities and outcomes for a disproportionate number of minority children.

At the elementary school level, blacks are disproportionately more likely to be enrolled in special education programs and less likely to be enrolled in programs for the gifted and talented than are whites. At the high school level, blacks are overrepresented in vocational education programs where they receive less preparation in English, mathematics and science.[18]

Whatever the calculus that forces minority students (even the gifted ones) to choose less difficult majors that are deadends as far as leading to significant careers, the imperatives are clear for immediate and dramatic intervention. Recruitment and retention programs in mathematics and science must start in the early years to make a difference.

Analysis of black public school enrollment in nursery through high school reveals significant progress over the last 15 years. The record shows that by 1977 the differences between black and white pre-school enrollment had narrowed to less than 5%. Improvements in both enrollment and retention was also noted for the high schools.

After age 17, however, the picture is somber. At ages 18 and 19, 22% of black youth are still attending high school compared to 8% of white youth. In large measure, this picture reflects the exceedingly poor quality of urban schooling. In many schools, achievement levels are oftentimes five years below the national average. High school graduates are functionally illiterate, truancy is epidemic and psychologicval dropping out commonplace. Consequently, we find a huge cohort of black youth, out of school, out of jobs and out of prospects, with dangerously low levels of education.

At a time when there is need in our society for a technologically literate population, a workforce with an understanding of the fundamentals of science and technology to perform the jobs of the future, we are creating an economically

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useless population. This is one of the most critical problems facing American society.

The minority members of the workforce will be poorly educated, low-paid service workers, supporting a large predominantly white over 65 population. The pool of funds that this small poorly paid segment of entry level workers will contribute will be inadequate to support the social security system.

Conventional social science wisdom has insisted that how well children do in school depends primarily on the nature of the family from which they come. Depressed achievement for minority students was thus presumed to derive from non-school influences such as family background. However, when schools place low income students in the least rigorous classes in math and then lower curricula requirements for such classes, the schools effectively discourage minority participation in advanced classes such as calculus and physics. A competing interpretation would be that the school's response to family background is the cause of depressed achievement for low income and minority students. Most educational institutions assume as a matter of course that their significant clientele will be white middle-class Americans and that students who are not from this group will be at a disadvantage because of the prior assumption of the educational systems.

In a similar vein, the instructional staff in community colleges have not been provided with methods and techniques for coping with bias, for developing a sensitivity to cultural differences of minorities and for examining in structured learning situations, the relationship between student and teacher in multi-cultural classrooms. Appropriate teaching strategies for minorities and how to integrate culturally relevant materials into the curriculum should be included in teacher training and in-service programs.[19]

The current emphasis on excellence has set in motion a number of currents that will operate to further depress the learning levels of minority students. Various commission reports have suggested that public resources should be refocussed towards students with acceptable in-school skills, technological head starts and higher than average incomes. Many of the reports imply that equity and excellence are mutually exclusive. I submit that excellence is not the exclusive property of non-minorities, suburban school districts or the wealthy. The malfunctioning of economic, governmental and defense institutions in the 1980's are not occurring because minorities are in charge. Just as federal economic policy transferred more than $25 billion from poor and middle class family to the top 20% of families since 1980,[20] federal education policy seems to be gearing up to transfer scarce resources to those students whose needs are fewest. The notion that the federal government will become an advocate for the

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influential and advantaged is troubling. There is also a renewed concern for science and technology that will affect minority participation in adequately funded programs.

Much of urban schooling is a cultural and academic wasteland. One index of its pathology is the high attrition rates of minorities, 78% of blacks and 70-80% of Puerto Ricans in New York City, 40-50% of Asian Americans in Boston and 48-85`% of Native Americans nationally. When up to 85% of a group drops out, can it realistically be said that schooling still exists. What will become of these high school dropouts and functional illiterates in the heart of the nation's cities. Can the community college absorb them, are they willing to absorb them?

How can we remedy the increasingly apparent and critical deficiencies of the school system? Obviously, urban secondary schools must become more effective. There is a growing movement in effective school programs. The results in a variety of cities indicate that effective schools do not have to be located in the suburbs.

The Effective Schools Development in Education Act of 1984 provides incentives and support for school systems in desinging and implementing an effective schools program. Because of our open-door mission, we are constantly engaged in repairing the deficiencies of high schools preparation. In this regard, we need to be proactive rather than reactive.

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We need to strengthen the relationship between the high school and two-year institions. This can be fostered through such mechanisms as articulation agreements, partnerships, 3 + 1 or 2 + 2 programs and career tryout programs. The latter is particularly important because given the powerful and unique situational determinants of the educational, economic and social life of minorities, the perception of vocational access is undoubtedly more restrictive for minority youth than for whites.[21]

Urban two-year institutions could also "adopt" public schools. This cooperative arrangement would involve direct instruction through courses to students both in the public school setting and in the college; the placement of instructional staff in the public schools, intensive orientation sessions for students and school staff or training and employment in occupational and technological fields; technical assistance to school personnel in incorporating into the curriculum pre-vocational and technological concepts; technical assistance in the development of technical math and science curriculum modules and technical assistance in the in-servicing of the public school staff.

Evidence from the literature on school dropouts and minority students achievement clearly suggests the efficacy of early intervention. Intervention programs must be targeted at the middle school grades if they are to be effective. "Adopting" a senior high should, therefore, be accompanied by a plan of

services to students in the feeder middle schools. Other collaborative relationships could be established with community based organizations that offer basic skills programs.

Improving the quality of education at the primary and secondary levels and increased collaboration between secondary and two-year institutions have a critical bearing on the future of minorities in two-year institutions.

The Role of Minority Professionals

One of the persistent correlations we find in the literature is the relationship between the presence of minority staff and the extent and quality of minority student learning. However, in proportion to minority enrollments in two-year colleges, minority faculty are poorly represented. Two-year institutions are dominated by white males to an extraordinary degree, from governing boards to administration, faculty and staff. The paucity of minorities at the teaching and administrative level can be attributed to institutional resistance, the availability of minority professionals and the skewing of minority hiring toward non-instructional staff. Minorities will have to deal with the allegations in their own institutions that the pool of qualified minorities might be limited. We also need to assess the impact of part time faculty hiring upon affirmative action programs and the hiring of minority faculty.

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The periods of growth in two-year institutions have not produced corollary growth in the percentage of minorities in positions of influence. There is considerable evidence that current levels are being eroded and that future representation will be even less representative. This is primarily due to economic imperatives. The majority of two-year institutions are in a retrenching mode. But more profound is the fact that the executive branch seems to be less enthusiastic, less spirited in its pursuit of affirmative action. In fact, the administration appears in a hurry to dismantle the enforcement and regulatory apparatus as it pertains to anti-discrimination and affirmative action laws. Minorities have to adjust to a world in which the climate of opinion is no longer favorable to affirmative action.

Minority professionals have a significant role to play in assuring that the proper conditions affecting minority student learning are present in the institutional environment. Many minority professionals are present in two-year institutions because of the pressures of affirmative action to hire minorities. They have incurred an obligation to see to it that the system is responsive to the needs of minority students. They can serve as advocates for minority concerns. Minority professionals can aid in the effort to recruit minority students, serve as their mentors and role models [22] and be part of the academic support system to ensure that these students successfully survive the institution. Minority professionals can also help in the recruitment of qualified

applicants for positions at their institution. At the same time they should utilize a variety of mechanisms to enhance their own careers.

Conclusions

What creative responses will two-year institutions bring to the challenges of access and equity raised by ethnic minorities?[23] We can start with some modest objectives:

First, set enrollment goals of matching the institutions entering class with that of the graduating seniors in the college's service area. Second, achieve retention rates of minorities which is equal to the retention rates of non-minority students. Third, achieve graduation rates equal to the graduation rates of non-minority students. Fourth, ensure that minorities have a significant presence at all levels of the institution.

These objectives and other recommendations alluded to in the paper might appear mundane and elementary even if they were implemented fully. It is clear, however, that even well-intentioned institutions often fail to meet the needs of minority students. It is, therefore, essential that special efforts be exerted to remedy, at least in part, historical exclusion. There are changes needed in the individual, a recognition by minority groups of their unique responsibility and changes in the system itself. To blame the system will not help when the error resides in the adaptation of the

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individual. To blame the victim is of questionable value when the real problem is a defective institutional process.

Minorities will not disappear if their issues are ignored in planning for the future. The reality of demographics means that they will be the new majority in urban two-year schools of the future. They will also be the majority in several age cohorts in the 21st Century. It is safe to say that the future of higher education will be driven even more than it is now by the demography of its minority constituencies. The data discussed and recommendations delineated can serve to tap the reservoir of good will in the non-minority gate keepers. Two-year institutions will better realize their missions when they take serious steps to develop this human resource to its full potential.

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